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ABSTRACT

Noting ongoing difficulties in identifying the fundamental role of social studies in educating young children, this chapter focuses on how children begin to develop historical and geographic understanding. The chapter considers age-appropriate and developmental concerns and the role of national standards in history and geography. The chapter examines changing views of teaching history, discussing research findings on children's time concepts, the linkage between history and time, and implications for teaching history to young children. The essay also describes how the national history standards reflect changing views about history and how it is to be taught to young children. In addition, the chapter discusses changing views of teaching geography, including reasons for omitting geography from many early childhood curricula and the role of national standards in guiding the development of geography curricula for young children. Research is summarized on children's awareness of spatial relationships, interest in places and regions, and understanding of physical systems. The chapter concludes by noting that disagreements over what should be taught to young children in social studies hamper teachers' decision making regarding curricula. The essay further maintains that both the history and geography standards fail to address early childhood prior to kindergarten entry and notes that despite the focus of professional organizations and government on programs for young children, the field remains splintered on the issue of social studies curricula. The chapter calls for greater involvement of early childhood professionals in developing standards and meaningful social studies curricula for young children. (Contains 56 references.) (KB)

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CHAPTER 7

Early Childhood Social Studies

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THE SEARCH for an identity for early childhood social studies is an ongoing activity. This unity quest on the part of some educators is related to the identity problems and struggles faced by the social studies profession at both the broad K-12 and the primary and elementary school levels. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is the learned society that promotes social studies education in the public schools. Although the NCSS claims sovereignty over the social studies curriculum, it is in competition with other professional groups when it comes to setting standards, establishing goals, and specifying content with disciplines such as history, geography, and economics. Thornton (1996a, 1996b), in describing the role of the NCSS in these struggles, has indicated that there are not only duplication and overlap among the various organizations in their proposals for national standards in history, geography, and social studies, but also conflicting perspectives of social studies within the NCSS.

WHAT IS SOCIAL STUDIES?

In the early 1990s, the NCSS, without resolving the debates and controversies, began to define its mission and the nature of social studies education and to articulate its position (Barth, 1996). This resulted in the publication of *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (NCSS, 1994). These standards indicated that the focus of social studies is "designed to promote civic competence: and it is integrative" (p. 3). This inte-

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gration involves knowledge, skills, and attitudes from a number of disciplines.

Part of the problem with the identity of social studies in the early grades is its relative rank in the public school curriculum. In a recent study that examined the status of social studies in Delaware, Thornton and Houser (1997) found that social studies was still perceived as a second-rank subject. There are also questions about teachers' professional interest and commitment to social studies. Jarolimek (1996) has indicated, "So much of elementary school teachers' time and effort are dedicated to teaching literacy and other basic skills that their professional interests naturally are pulled in the direction of professional organizations concerned with reading, language arts, or mathematics" (p. 104). This concern is partially addressed by the NCSS (1994) in its curriculum standards when it calls for a complete core curriculum with social studies viewed as a basic K–12 component, for "all students should have access to the full richness of the social studies curriculum" (p. 162).

Just calling for and publishing standards, however, may not be enough. There is still the need to provide leadership and promote cooperation and collaboration across the field. This may be a challenge that the NCSS is not able to meet:

> Social studies programs are today being shaped by competing constituencies who want to see the curriculum developed around what they believe to be important—whether that is one of the disciplines, i.e., history, geography, economics, civics; or social causes such as multiculturalism, diversity, ethnicity, gender; or other issues associated with the "political correctness" phenomenon. (Jarolimek, 1996, p. 109)

Even with all the concerns about the identity and nature of early childhood and elementary social studies, school systems in the early grades still have traditionally employed either a spiral- or widening-horizons approach to the curriculum—and more recently an attempt to integrate the two approaches (Ellis, 1998). The widening-horizons approach emphasizes a movement from the simple to the more complex, taking into account the developmental nature of children and a movement from self to an understanding of the global nature of the world. The spiral curriculum requires the identification of basic structures, which are revisited at increasing levels of complexity as children move through the grades. The emphasis is on in-depth coverage over time of important social science concepts.

Some teachers take a child-centered approach to the curriculum, which emphasizes self-development and appropriate practices, while other

teachers stress more of a society-centered approach focusing on citizenship and democratic principles. A third common approach centers on the attainment of knowledge, including ways of knowing and focusing on key concepts from the various social science disciplines (Ellis, 1998). In reality, elements of all three of these approaches influence decisions concerning the nature of early childhood social studies.

Little has changed since 1976, when Jantz stressed the necessity for social studies teachers of young children to become decision makers centered around the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the social studies curriculum. He advocated that teachers be aware of the nature of the students, the nature of learning, the nature of society, and the nature of knowledge as they make choices about the social studies curriculum.

Finally, Seefeldt (1992) also called for greater cooperation and communication among various professional groups to move beyond rhetoric and to identify the fundamental role of social studies in the education of young children, but she warned decision makers of the dangers of mixing and matching the goals of early childhood education with the goals of social studies for young children:

> When the complexities of the field of social studies meet the confounding factors of early childhood education, the problems involved in specifying appropriate social studies content expand, and the question of how either field can effectively fulfill its overarching purpose—that of preparing children to become members of a democracy—remains unanswered. (p. 216)

The need for early childhood educators to become decision makers in terms of the curriculum and approaches to teaching still exists in early childhood social studies today. The question, then, for this review is: What is happening now in early childhood social studies and how is it different from what has already been reported in previous reviews? The development of key understandings from the social sciences—history and geography—by young children is still an important concern. The main focus of this chapter is on the growing knowledge of how children begin to develop historical and geographic understandings considering age-appropriateness and developmental concerns, as well as the role of national standards in both fields.

CHANGING VIEWS OF TEACHING HISTORY

Since the 1980s, there have been a number of articles published indicating that children have a developing sense of history and that the teacher's

role in this development may be changing (Egan, 1997; Levstik, 1986; Levstik & Pappas, 1992; Seefeldt, 1993; Thornton, 1990). Levstik (1986) showed how the use of narrative and students' responses were linked together in developing a sense of history. Egan (1997) advocated the use of stories to help propel students through the layers of historical understanding that develop in children. Thornton (1990) cautioned against adding more history to the curriculum but advocated the need for more research on how teachers teach and how students learn relationships among time concepts, historical understandings, and historical reasoning. Some new directions in how primary grade children develop historical understandings through the use of narrative structures were reported by Levstik and Pappas (1992). They indicated that for young children not only does the story structure have appeal, but primary grade children can also follow the sequence of events depicted. The case for teaching history to young children was made by Seefeldt (1993). She cautioned against using storytelling and myths if they were teaching misconceptions about history, advocating that they instead be used to emphasize ideas of time and change as related to continuity in human life. She stated that historical exemplars, including those in story form, need to be meaningful to the learner and connected to experiences in their lives.

Time

Earlier reviews of early childhood social studies have indicated a strong relationship between children's cognitive development and their development of time concepts (Downey & Levstik, 1991; Jantz, 1976; Seefeldt, 1992; Wyner & Farquhar, 1991). Most of the research has centered on describing children's understanding of clock time, calendar time, and eventually psychological time. Children appear to progress from responding to time concepts, beginning to use time concepts, and finally being able to fully understand time concepts. Piaget (1971) indicated that two types of time concepts are exhibited by young children. There is intuitive time, which is "limited to successions and duration given by direct perceptions" (p. 2), and psychological time, which uses logic as a basis for the operational understanding of time. Piaget believed time to be the coordination or consideration of at least two motions. He stated, "But if time as we suggest is the operational coordination of motions themselves, then the relations between simultaneity, succession and duration must first be constructed one by one" (p. 3).

Thornton and Vukelich (1988), summarizing the research on children's development of time concepts, reported that children first become aware of personal time between 4 and 7 years of age. Children use in-

definite time concepts based on linguistic patterns to differentiate the past from the present and the future. Children at this age also begin to describe daily events in a sequential pattern. Chronological time is often associated with personal time and is reflected by the cyclical nature of daily events.

> Mark, a five-year old, was asked, "How long is a day?" He replied, "It's today until you get to tomorrow!" He was then asked, "How long is that?" Mark replied, "Today is when you get up and you play and you eat lunch and you play some more and you go to school and you come home and it's nice outside and then it's night and you go to sleep and when you wake up it's tomorrow!" (Jantz, 1976, p. 96)

Finally, by about age 6 or 7, "rudimentary discriminations of clock and calendar skills begin to appear," with discrimination of clock time developed from the large units (hours) to the smaller units (minutes), and discrimination of calendar time developed from the large units (months) to the smaller units (days) (Thorton & Vukelich, 1988, p. 71).

The development of historical time requires the child to depict a person, place, artifact, or event in the past using some form of time language (Thornton & Vukelich, 1988). Thorton and Vukelich further reported that, "Many researchers believe that the development of historical time depends on the prerequisite skills of personal, calendar, and clock time" (p. 71). Downey and Levstik (1991), in a review of teaching and learning history, indicated that children do understand historical time as related to patterns and sequences in real events even though for young children these might be general and imprecise.

History and Time

Logic would indicate that history and time are linked together; however, there is little research available to depict how these two areas are interdependent. Thornton and Vukelich (1988) identified three perspectives from researchers in the cognitive developmental perspective advocated by the British researcher Hallam (1970). In this perspective, history and time are linked with cognition. The lack of reversibility thinking in preoperational children limits their conception of history. A second, kindred perspective—supported by an American researcher, Sleeper (1975)—is related to psychosocial development. This perspective posits that a full understanding of historical time is related to formal operations and the processes of attaining adulthood. A third perspective, espoused by Spieseke (1963), relates to an organic curriculum view, which emphasizes that since time and history are interrelated, they are best taught in the

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context of meaningful social problems. Thornton and Vukelich (1988) advocate a position that they called developmental historical time. This perspective is based on the following points:

> 1. Learning time is most likely tied to the learner's current developmental structure.
> 2. Time understandings should be a major consideration in how historical topics are introduced.
> 3. Historical time concepts should be taught in conjunction with history just as clock and calendar time concepts are taught in conjunction with math.
> 4. Time and history are no more or less complex than algebra and trigonometry in math or the great works in literature. . . . It may be, in other words, that if the learning task is organized appropriately, then younger children can deal with more complex modes of thought than Piaget believed.
> 5. Consideration of historical time leads to a general point—the need for a clearer understanding of how children learn history. This is the case because time appears to be an integral component of historical reasoning. (pp. 78–80)

Teaching History

In the learning of history, there are differences between learning dates and developing a chronological perspective (Levstik & Barton, 1997b; see also Levstik & Barton, 1997a). Dates refer to a moment in time and have little meaning for children before the age of about 10 (Barton & Levstik, 1996). This may be due in part to the lack of visual references associated with dates and in part to a lack of knowledge about the numerical basis of dates. Chronology, on the other hand, relates to the ability to order moments in time. Usually this involves visualizations or narratives that invoke a form of visualization for the particular moments. Children as young as 5 have demonstrated the capacity to order events chronologically using photographs and pictures with such broad distinctions as "long ago" and "close to now." It appears that dress and level of technology are the two primary visual clues that students use.

It should be noted, however, that visual references can also lead to misconceptions. The potential impact of images is important when considering the historical context. When teaching history using images, Rothwell (1997) reported that it is important to consider not only the historical facts but also the accuracy of images.

Since dates have little meaning for young children, "teachers have to approach dates as concepts to be developed: they have to help students

associate their visual images of history with the dates that correspond to them" (Levstik & Barton, 1997b, p. 74). Although there is little or no empirical support for using timelines (Thornton & Vukelich, 1988), they are common features in classrooms and textbooks. Extending timelines into visual timelines may be one tool to help students match dates with visual images, thus using their prior knowledge of chronology to further refine their broad categories of historical time (long ago) into more distinct categories (the 1880s). Visual timelines might also help young children to begin to compare different events occurring at the same point in time, thus challenging "a particularly common aspect of children's chronological thinking, their assumption of linear historical development" (Levstik & Barton, 1997b, p. 75).

Barton and Levstik (1996) in their study of children from kindergarten through sixth grade provided an alternate to an emphasis on dates and chronology for teaching history—an emphasis on people's lived experiences. They reported:

> This research thus indicates that historical understanding can develop independently of adult temporal vocabularies and suggests that the primacy of dates and chronologies in history instruction be de-emphasized in favor of content and reasoning aimed more at helping children understand the richness and variety of people's lived experiences in different times and places. (p. 444)

Historical understanding develops in layers and is evident in the mythical, oral traditions exhibited in children's stories and storytelling from different times and places (Egan, 1989). The story structure of fairy tales tends to be binary in nature, with an emphasis on such ideas as good/bad or security/fear structured in concrete ways. Young children under the age of 8 begin to mediate these binary opposites in much the same way as they mediate "hot and cold" with "warm." Nature and culture are mediated with talking bears and rabbits. Story forms with beginnings, middles, and ultimately a finished end influence the development of one layer of historical understanding. "We can do this for children by telling them the dramatic stories of human cultures, particularly of the one of which they are a part and partial product. A potential benefit of such a history curriculum is that it introduces children to their world in a dynamic and dramatic form" (Egan, 1989, p. 290).

The power of narrative to help children understand history has been advocated by a number of researchers. McKeown and Beck (1994) stated that narrative

> is inherently causal and explanatory in nature; a narrative is a series of events that lead from one to the other through causes and consequences. Narrative is a familiar form even to very young learners, who have experienced it in daily interactions as well as in stories that make up the bulk of their early contact with text. (p. 21)

The linkage between history and narrative in the development of historical understandings has often been overlooked, but it can be an effective mechanism for student learning (Levstik, 1995). Narratives have a great deal of appeal for children in learning history, but students need to develop skills of critical analysis and inquiry when developing historical understanding. There are some cautions in using narratives; for example, the narrative may be too storylike, resulting in misinterpretations. Students may also focus on the linear progression of history and fail to realize that certain events were occurring simultaneously in different places at the same time. Levstick and Barton (1997b) indicate that narrative can be used with younger children but that "the relationship between narrative, history, and historical understanding is more complex than appreciation of a story well-told" (p. 92).

However, Levstik (1990) did argue that narrative can assist young children with looking at the human aspect of history, describing an approach taken by a primary grade teacher that focused on human aspects. The students, with teacher guidance, engaged in an inquiry project on why Christopher Columbus was famous. They were to consider two questions: How does the past influence the present, and how does the present influence our interpretations of the past?

These ideas were brought together through the concept of "fame." Using powerful ideas and inquiry as the focus of social studies is not new, but they can be used to help develop historical understanding and as a partial solution to the depth–breadth dilemma of the allocation of resources and time (VanSledright, 1997).

Finally, there have been some recent attempts to investigate children's thinking as it is related to the development of historical understanding. The CHATA Research Project in the United Kingdom focused on what they called second-order concepts—a cause, evidence, explanation, motive, interpretation (Ashby, Lee, & Dickinson, 1997). While the authors indicated that it was too early to form conclusions, they did find signs of progression in children's ideas about the nature of historical explanation. Children's ideas seem to progress in the following order: "Things happen because people want them to; the more agents want something, the more likely they are to achieve it; what people want has

some connection with what happens, but it is not the first thing to look at to explain the outcome of actions" (p. 20).

Barton (1997), in summarizing what we know about teaching history to children, reported that the research indicates that children learn a great deal of history outside of school and this prior knowledge can be used to develop historical understanding. The source of this prior knowledge includes things children come in contact with in their everyday lives—artifacts, places, pictures, and oral traditions from their family histories. Students seem to know more about social history and have more problems with political history, particularly when it is presented in limited, text-based detail covering local, state, national, and sometimes international events in a relatively short period of time. Thornton (1997) supported the active nature of learning history: "There is growing reason to conclude that students doing history for themselves enhances both their motivation and reflect powers beyond what is ordinarily obtained from textbook-based instruction" (p. 11). Barton (1997) concluded:

> Teachers who are willing and able to engage students in active investigations, to build on what children already know and to address misconceptions, will stand a good chance of helping them to develop meaningful historical understanding. (p. 16)

History Standards

These changing views of history and how to teach it to young children are reflected to some degree in the national standards for history (National Center for History in the Schools [hereafter NCHS], 1994). The standards were developed by the National Council for History Standards with some participation by 33 different organizations, including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Council of State Social Studies Supervisors, and the National Council for the Social Studies. Absent were representatives from the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the Association for Childhood Education International. The standards reflect two categories: historical thinking and historical understanding. Historical thinking includes "chronological thinking . . . , historical comprehension . . . , historical analysis and interpretation . . . , historical research capabilities, [and] historical issues-analysis and decision making" (pp. 6–7). According to the standards, the historical understandings to be developed in children are "of society," including "family structures," gender roles, and relationships among individuals and groups; "the scientific quest" for efficient development; "the

political sphere of activity" in the local community, state, and nation, including "the core principles and values of American democracy"; and the "human experience" as expressed in "literature, sacred writings and oral traditions, drama, art, architecture, music, and dance" (pp. 5–6).

CHANGING VIEW OF TEACHING GEOGRAPHY

If social studies is given second-rate status in the elementary school curriculum (Thornton & Houser, 1997), then the rank of teaching geography, a key subject of social studies, is nonexistent. Just as the search for identity in the field of social studies is ongoing, so is the search for goals, objectives, and methods of teaching geography to children during the period from birth through age 8.

Even though Lucy Sprague Mitchell's influential *Young Geographers*, written in 1934, guided early childhood curriculum for decades, geography is not thought of as a core content area in the early childhood curriculum. In part, this may be due to the misinterpretation of Mitchell's ideas of children learning geography through exploration of their here-and-now world. By enlarging and enriching children's understanding of the immediate environment and their place in it, Mitchell's goal was to develop children's capabilities in terms of relationship thinking and generalizing from one experience to another. Through investigations of their immediate physical world, Mitchell postulated that children would see the relationship of one fact to another, thereby producing something different from, and adding to, the separate facts—a relationship.

Mitchell's ideas of learning through the here-and-now world were quickly embraced by the early childhood community. Unfortunately, just as quickly they became trivialized. Ignoring the geographic complexities of children's here-and-now world and the role of children as investigators of that world, teachers presented children with intellectually sterile unit topics such as Learning About Myself, Rules for Safe Living, The Shopping Center, and People Change the Earth (Jarolimek & Parker, 1993).

Geography may also be missing from the early childhood curriculum because early childhood teachers, who tend to be child-centered rather than discipline-centered, are often more concerned with developing an integrated curriculum—one that meets the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of children—than with including geography in the curriculum. Teachers themselves are often ignorant of geography. As a part of their undergraduate program, they may have taken one course in the social sciences chosen from among a variety of fields—sociology, history, economics—but may never have taken a geography course. This

leaves the typical early childhood teacher without a solid understanding of the geographic concepts—and even less knowledge of how concepts from the field of geography could be introduced to young children in meaningful, appropriate ways.

Aware of the void in their curriculum, the field of early childhood viewed the identification of national standards for the study of geography as positive. The identification of national standards for geography would, early childhood educators believed, provide the guidance necessary to create a sequential, conceptual, and developmentally appropriate geography curriculum for young children.

In the past inroads were made in the identification of concepts key to a given discipline. Bruner, in *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (1966) and *The Process of Education* (1960), advanced the idea that social studies, like every other discipline area, could be planned around concepts key to the discipline. With the identification of these concepts, a spiral curriculum could be implemented. The big ideas, or key concepts, could be used to coordinate the knowledge or content sequences with the cognitive stages of the learner so that at each successive stage children would be dealing with concepts they could understand, but in progressively greater complexity and depth.

Bruner's philosophy was difficult to implement. First, concepts key to geography were difficult to identify. There was lack of agreement about what these consisted of, and confusion over which were critical for young children to learn. There were other problems as well: Teachers of young children rarely had the experience necessary to translate the identified concepts into appropriate learning experiences for children.

Standards Today

Thus it was with optimism that early childhood educators looked to the geography standards, *Geography for Life: National Standards—1994* (Geography Education Standards Project [hereafter GESP], 1994), to guide them in developing appropriate geography curricula for young children. The opening sentences of the national geography standards reflected the philosophy that children learn through questioning and exploration of their immediate environment. Both the first sentence, "Geography is for life in every sense of that expression" (GESP, 1994, p. 11), and the definition of geography as "a field of study that enables us to find answers to questions about the world around us—about where things are and how and why they got there" (GESP, 1994, p. 11), seemed congruent with early childhood philosophy and practices.

Likewise, Mitchell (1934) would have agreed with the standards'

statement that the study of geography is for life, bringing together the physical and human dimensions of the study of people, places, and environments. On the other hand, Mitchell, like today's early childhood educators, would not agree with the numerous and abstract specific performance standards accompanying these valid definitions of geography.

Regrettably, the standards as now stated are of limited help to early childhood educators and may even be damaging. Instead of organizing the geography curriculum around concepts key to geography, the standards state 57 content standards (that is, what children are expected to achieve by the time they complete fourth grade) and over 60 performance standards. Embedded in each of the standards are numerous facts and concepts, negating any possibility of teachers using the standards as a guide in selecting key concepts.

"More importantly, the geography standards fail children" (Seefeldt, 1995, p. 109). Identifying meaningful concepts is but one step in the teaching/learning process. The other is knowing how to make these meaningful to young children. Created with limited knowledge of what geographic concepts children already know, the skills they possess, and which of these they could obtain with the assistance of an adult, the national geographic standards are simply overwhelming and unmanageable (Seefeldt, 1995).

The specific performance standards given for the teaching of spatial systems, physical regions, and physical systems could take over the entire early childhood curriculum. It is not that children are unable to develop initial awareness and personal knowledge of space, the physical characteristics of their world, or the physical systems of weather and seasons, but rather that preoperational children are unable to master the level of abstractness found in the standards.

Spatial Systems

Throughout early childhood, children's awareness of spatial relationships is developing. The knowledge of object permanence and the spatial relationships between objects grows as children explore and move about their environment.

Children as young as 3 years old, without hesitation or prompting, have been found to express their understanding of spatial relationships by spontaneously drawing or building maps. Researchers have also documented young children's awareness of maps (Liben & Downs, 1993; Liben & Yekel, 1996; Trifonoff, 1995). It seems that when mapping is introduced to children in the context of their personal knowledge and understanding of maps, they can use maps quite proficiently (Marzoff &

DeLoache, 1994). Gutierrez (1993) described a primary-level field geography program in which students explored the geography and archaeology of their rural community using maps. Describing children's first-hand experiences with using maps, Maxim (1997) suggested that children's general geographic knowledge is enhanced through map-reading activities.

Even without first-hand experiences, Sowden (1996) demonstrated that preschoolers were able to interpret black-and-white aerial photographs and to solve simulated navigational programs using the photograph. Thus the first geography standard—"How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective"—is achievable, at least on a preliminary, awareness level. It is doubtful, however, whether any child under the age of 7 or 8 would be able to identify and describe the basic elements of maps—"(e.g., title, legend, cardinal and intermediate directions, scale, grid, principal parallels, meridians)"—during the period of early childhood or achieve any of the other multitude of abstract, highly complex concepts of mapping, such as being able to locate major rivers, cities, or landforms on a map; to identify physical and human features along a major route on a map; or to analyze the earth's surface in terms of its spatial elements of point, line, area, and volume—all of which are called for in the geography standards.

Based on knowledge of children's ability to conceptualize and understand abstractions, it would be impossible for children under the age of 10 or so to master the abstract concepts of representation, symbolization, orientation, and direction identified in the specific performance standards of the first geography standard, The World in Spatial Terms. Before 10 or 11 years of age, children have little conceptual understanding of perspective, scale, or representation. It is not until after the development of formal thought, around age 12, that children are able to conceptualize the total relationship of a map to the objects it represents or to infer information based on those relationships (Mosenthal & Kirsch, 1990).

Places and Regions

During the period of early childhood, children are, as Mitchell (1934) believed, very much like geographers. They dig in the sand, explore what they can do to water and how it acts on them, and question their world, asking: What is this? Why is it this way? Do sunflowers always grow here?

Naturally inquisitive about the place in which they live, young children are indeed ready to be introduced to the national geography stan-

dard of The Physical and Human Characteristics of Places. They can identify the physical characteristics of the places in which they live and learn the names of landforms, bodies of water, soil, vegetation, weather, and climate in their immediate environment—as called for in the geography standards.

Mayer (1995), like Mitchell (1934), maintains that place geography can be taught effectively—that is, if Dewey's assertion that students' experiences serve as the springboard for their learning is true. And Ely (1994) demonstrated how young students can explore relationships, organize information, and make generalizations about the world around them.

On the other hand, they will fail if asked to perform the specific performance standards of "using a data-retrieval chart organized by human features of economic activity, type of housing" (GESP, 1994, p. 113); "describe physical regions by studying the physical environment at a variety of scales and using field notes, maps, and other sources" (p. 115); or "use graphic materials to compare the geographic characteristics of regions of the world at similar latitudes" (p. 115).

Instruction in the geographic concepts of place and region must match children's existing knowledge. What we introduce to children must be achievable, yet challenging. Piaget (1971) described children's growing awareness of the physical characteristics of the earth. Dominated by artificialism and animism, children attribute life and consciousness to the earth, sun, moon, and stars as well as to living things (Vosniadow, 1994). Throughout the early years, children are even confused about what constitutes life. Three-year-olds will attribute life to anything that moves. Until about age 7 or 8, children believe cars, planes, rivers, and clouds have life and consciousness.

Until about age 9 or 10, children also retain the belief that every object, including natural bodies, was made for a purpose (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). A natural object, such as the sun, a lake, or a mountain, is made for warmth, boating, or climbing, and because it has been made for humans, is closely allied to them.

Physical Systems

The geography standards state that, by the fourth grade, the students should know and understand:

1. The Physical Processes that Shape the Patterns and Earth's Surfaces
2. The Characteristics and Spatial Distribution of Ecosystems on Earth's Surfaces. (NCSS, 1994)

This includes students knowing and understanding atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere; how patterns of location, distribution, and association of features on the earth's surfaces are shaped by physical process; and how earth–sun relations affect conditions on the earth.

As Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1995) point out, there is a cycle of learning that begins with becoming aware, proceeds to being able to explore and inquire, and culminates in using and applying what has been learned. Obviously, children during the period of early childhood will not be able to comprehend the geography standards for physical systems. How could children, who believe the moon is theirs alone, and follows them around at night (Piaget, 1951), know and understand the physical systems standards?

Children can, however, develop an awareness of the idea that the earth rotates around the sun—not by using a model, as suggested in the standards, but through their own experiences with night and day, shadows, and seasons. Mitchell, whose ideas reflected the philosophy of John Dewey, believed curriculum content stemmed directly from children's interactions with their immediate environment. Advocating building the geography curriculum on the content of children's here-and-now lives, Mitchell (1934) wrote:

> The practical tasks for each school are to study the geographic relations in the environment into which their children are born and to watch the children's behavior in their environment, to note when they first discover relations and what they are. On the basis of these findings each school will make it's own curriculum for young children. (p. 12)

Huffman (1996) illustrated how, through informal and more formal experiences with the immediate environment, young children develop knowledge and understanding of the physical systems of our earth. She found that preschool children were able to observe the weather, record their observations, and share books about weather phenomena. Children studied rain and rainbows, coaxing some into being with a prism, a garden hose, and a mirror and pan of water. They learned that the prism worked well, while their other methods did not. They observed clouds, noticing movement and shapes, and read Christina Rossetti's poem "Clouds." As Mitchell (1934) pointed out, the children Huffman studied behaved very much like geographers, not only investigating their world and learning facts but also, more importantly, relating each fact to others and forming generalizations.

CONCLUSION

Despite current research and discussion surrounding the teaching of history and the national geography standards, early childhood educators continue, as in the past, to be responsible for the creation of the social studies curriculum. Currently, the disagreements over what should be taught to young children in the field of social studies hampers, rather than facilitates, teachers' decision making. The field, comprised of diverse constituencies, offers teachers very different and often opposing ideas about what history and geography concepts young children should learn.

Then, too, both the history and geography standards fail to address the period of early childhood before entrance into kindergarten, ignoring the fact that the majority of children under the age of 5 are enrolled in some form of school. This omission may be due to the lack of involvement of the field of early childhood in the creation of the history and geography standards. Or it may reflect that fact that the field of early childhood remains as diverse as the field of social studies.

Despite the influential early childhood associations—the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Association for Childhood Education International—and the large government focus on programs for young children, the field of early childhood remains splintered. Diverse constituencies—the federal and state governments, local school systems, churches, businesses, charitable associations, and others—present diverse opinions and perspectives on what children should be taught when.

Nevertheless, the noninvolvement of the early childhood education field in establishing standards for history and geography education is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the early childhood curriculum is an integrated curriculum. If early childhood educators had taken part in creating the standards, then perhaps there would be greater clarity about how geography, and to a lesser extent history, could be integrated into the entire curriculum.

Perhaps because early childhood educators were not consulted, the geography standards are unobtainable by children under the age of 7 or 8. To attempt to introduce young children, who are in the preoperational and concrete stages of mental development, to these abstract ideas holds potential danger. Wyner and Farquhar (1991), in their review of early childhood social studies in the *Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teacher and Learning*, cautioned against the pressures to learn more academics earlier at the expense of developmentally appropriate practice when making decisions about the curriculum. They stated that, "Preoperational children are pushed prematurely to perform concrete mental operations"

(pp. 101–141). They suggested a curriculum that produced thoughtful, active learners with an emphasis on affect and social cognition. They believe that, "Awareness of recent research on children's cognitive, affective, and social development is critical for researchers and teachers working toward the improvement of teaching and learning in early childhood social studies" (p. 109). They conclude, "Curriculum developers and teachers with knowledge of cognitive development can design appropriate social learning experiences to enable young children to begin to think about and conceptualize their life experiences" (pp. 101–141).

If mastery of abstract, complex geography concepts is expected, children's learning will be superficial at best. Next is the issue of failure. Because the geography standards are unachievable by young children, children may believe themselves failures if asked to master them. It is well known that failure leads humans to distance themselves from the situation that led to failure (Thorndike, 1913). Thus young children who fail to master the geography concepts could distance themselves from the study of geography in the future.

In the future early childhood educators and social scientists could meet together and reach agreement about what social science concepts young children should learn and how these can best be introduced to them. Using Vygotsky's (1986) theories as a guide, early childhood educators, researchers, and social scientists together could identify what children already know of specific history and geography concepts, and then what they could know and understand with the guidance of an adult.

Bruner (1966) called such a meeting in the early 1960s, beginning the process of designing meaningful social studies curricula for young children. Perhaps it is time for both fields, early childhood education and social scientists, to revisit Bruner's work. Clearly, the identification of standards in the fields of history and geography, as well as the expectations for social studies learning delineated by the NCSS, provides the foundation for continual work. With insights from Bruner's earlier work, and guidance from the philosophy of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the next step would be to identify the standards that are achievable for children from birth through age 7 or 8, and how best to arrange for children to do so.

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